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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ANTANANARIVO 000228

SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR AF/FO, AF/E AND AF/RSA MBITTRICK
DEPT FOR DS/IP/AF/E RMEDRANO
DEPT FOR DS/DSS/ITA DROTHSTEIN
DAR ES SALAAM FOR DAO
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [CN](#)
SUBJECT: SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT ON ANJOUAN

¶1. (SBU) Actions Requested: Post recommends the Department issue a statement setting the record straight on the Anjouan problem in the Comoros. Suggested points in para 4. Post also recommends the Department pursue efforts to support Comoros' request that the UN Security Council not take up this issue. End Action Requests.

¶2. (SBU) At a recent press conference, RSA Foreign Minister Dlamini-Zuma sounded much like the lawyer for the defense in "Bacar vs. Union of the Comoros." Her characterization of the Anjouan crisis is generous with regard to renegade Colonel Mohamed Bacar and suggests half or more of the blame is with the democratically-elected Union President Ahmed Sambi. This view is inconsistent with that of the African Union and all other friends of the Comoros.

¶3. (SBU) Worse, a Globe and Mail article March 20 was entitled "African Union to Stage Rare Coup in Comoros." The article quotes Bacar, but not Sambi, and manages to get it wrong every possible way.

Points For Press Statement
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¶4. (SBU) Post does not suggest a defensive or direct reply to these unhelpful statements. However, we recommend making clear that:

-- Diplomatic negotiations have been exhaustive and fruitless in dealing with Anjouan's Colonel Bacar;

-- A February 27 mission to Anjouan offered an ultimatum, including peaceful ways out of the impasse without violence, which Bacar rejected;

-- The United States supports the democratically elected President of the Union of the Comoros, President Ahmed Sambi. We support African Union efforts to restore order in the Comoros. We support unity in the Comoros.

-- African Union support to President Sambi to restore unity in the Comoros is needed and appropriate. Colonel Bacar has closed all avenues to resolving this crisis without military intervention.

U.S. Support For The Union of the Comoros
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¶5. (SBU) The Department is actively trying to respond to Tanzania's request for logistics support for their mission to restore unity in

the Comoros. The Comorans are very appreciative of the very attempt, even if ultimately not successful (for lack of time). Our Defense Attach and Union counterparts held a small ceremony March 20 to note the delivery of 5,000 lbs. of medical supplies donated by an NGO and shipped by the United States.

16. (SBU) In addition, a clear statement by the Department Spokesman setting the record straight would be a tremendous help to the Comorans. President Sambu would also appreciate our diplomatic efforts to address his concern about the Comoros issue being raised at the UN Security Council, rather than leaving it with the AU. Comoran Foreign Minister Jaffar on March 18 explicitly requested US diplomatic assistance to turn off any effort to bring this issue to the UNSC.

Statement and Article Texts

17. (U) For reference Post passes text of Dlamini-Zuma's remarks and the Globe and Mail article below.

BEGIN TEXT:

Notes Following Briefing To Media By Foreign Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma And Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum Mesfin, Diplomatic Guesthouse, Pretoria, Tuesday 18 March 2008
Question: If I may ask you Minister, the question of the Comoros is a burning issue at the moment. You've played a central role in that. The clashes overnight, the fact the AU is moving forces in. Is there an alternative? What is the situation, I'm asking in particular if there is an alternative to the full intervention of the AU, in other words the military solution?

Answer: (Minister Dlamini Zuma) Thank you. As you know that the AU

ANTANANARI 00000228 002 OF 003

had appointed a committee to deal with the Comoros since 1997. And the Comoros was a very unstable country. It had almost 20 coups in almost as many years. And the AU appointed a committee when there was a problem of secession and a combination also of a coup. The AU committee has worked very hard, spent many hours, resources. And indeed it had a lot to show for it because since 1998 there probably hasn't been a coup. A foundation has been laid for stability. There was a Fomboni Agreement, the constitution was amended. There was a new union constitution and the islands were then declared autonomous islands with their own constitution, with a kind of shared power between the union and the islands.

As you would recall that this crisis stems from an election which was supposed to take place on the 10th of June or May last year, which was going to be supervised by the AU. All three islands were going to have elections according to their laws that all three islands should have simultaneous elections. The AU forces were supervising the elections. On the 8th of June, two days before the elections, the president issued a decree postponing the elections in one of the islands, Anjouan. And of-course that came through while we were there, the AU forces and the AU special envoy were represented there. We also just heard that a decree had been issued to postpone the elections. Our forces were on the ground in Anjouan when that decree was made.

But to cut a long story short, the Anjouanese went ahead with the elections, arguing that there was no consultation that the elections are postponed. But nevertheless they went ahead. The AU and the constitutional court of Comoros did not recognize those elections. And therefore there has been a call to have new elections. And the real contest is that the AU committee did say there has to be new elections, because if the constitutional court of the country has said there has to be new elections, there should be new elections. But the same committee has recognized that there are problems of governance and some constitutional interpretations which are creating problems. And that there should be elections but also that there should be an effective address of this governance and constitutional issues.

The real problem is what comes first. The Anjouanese authorities say the discussion should come first because they believe that even the postponement of the elections is linked to these governance issues. And then the elections should come later. The rest say there should be elections first and then the discussions later.

That's really what is at stake here. And of-course as you say, there are countries there that are ready to go in and solve the problem militarily.

Our belief is that there is still a possibility of solving this diplomatically. Because it is to some extent unusual to go militarily into a place where there is no violence; where there is no loss of life; where there is no social unrest. We think it's possible to solve this diplomatically, but of-course we can't. There are countries which have heeded the call of the president of Comoros to assist him to solve the problem militarily. So that is what is happening. But as a country we believe that it could have still been done diplomatically. It's a small thing. Even the president of the Comoros accepts that there are governance issues, there are constitutional issues that need to be resolved. The real war is about whether the discussion comes first and then elections, or elections first and then discussions later. The Anjouanese authorities have given a date, they've said let's have a discussion and have the elections by May, which we thought could be a basis for then solving this diplomatically. Because they have expressed not only a willingness to have elections, but they have even said the elections could be in May. And this period in between could then be used for discussions. That's what we think. Thanks.
END TEXT

Globe and Mail Article

BEGIN TEXT

African Union to stage rare coup in Comoros
After long inaction in Zimbabwe and Darfur, member states are looking for an easy win to show progress to democracy, observer says

STEPHANIE NOLEN

From Wednesday's Globe and Mail

March 19, 2008 at 4:40 AM EDT

JOHANNESBURG - Troops are preparing an amphibious invasion of one island in the tiny East African archipelago of the Comoros to oust its leader in the name of defending democracy on the orders of the African Union.

It's a startling move for the AU, whose member states have

ANTANANARI 00000228 003 OF 003

consistently refused to take action on issues such as Robert Mugabe's tyrannical rule of Zimbabwe or the Sudanese government's backing of militias in Darfur, always citing the concept of national sovereignty.

"People will be asking, 'Why is the AU invading a country that is not strategically or economically or politically important?' And what is the difference between the situation in Comoros and that in Zimbabwe or Chad?" said Chrysantus Ayangafac, a researcher with the Direct Conflict Prevention Program at the Institute for Security Studies in Addis Ababa.

"But AU success in Comoros is going to give them some capital to say, 'We are solving some problems, tackling illegitimacy on the continent.' And the Comoros is a much easier animal to hunt [than Zimbabwe]. But if the AU fails, it doesn't harm their reputation: they will sweep it under the carpet."

The Comoros - a federation of three islands in the Indian Ocean between Tanzania on the mainland and Madagascar - has a population of about 700,000. Each island has a president and parliament, which sit beneath an overarching federal government.

An estimated 1,500 soldiers from Senegal, Tanzania, Sudan and Libya are amassing on the island of Moheli, preparing to take down President Mohammed Bacar, a former chief of police who is refusing to cede power on the neighbouring island of Anjouan. The AU has been asked to intervene by the federal government, after months of sanctions and negotiations have made no progress in ousting Mr. Bacar. France, the former colonial power in the Comoros, is providing logistical support to the planned invasion.

"We are outraged," Mr. Bacar told the Associated Press yesterday, saying the AU urges dialogue in other countries, "but with us, they only speak of force."

Mr. Bacar, who controls the island's economy, has the support of its business elite, but has cracked down harshly on human-rights groups, the news media and all perceived opponents. He has the loyalty of Anjouan's force of about 500 well-armed gendarmes and a private militia, which roughly matches the troop strength of the federal

force, which is why a military intervention requires outside involvement.

The driving force behind the invasion, which caught most Africa-watchers off-guard, appears to be Tanzania, which has the strongest ties of any African state to the Comoros. Tanzanian President Jakaya Kikwete, current chair of the AU, is acting on a request from Ahmed Abdallah Sambi, the President of the Comoros Union, the supergovernment.

South African President Thabo Mbeki, the single most influential player among AU leaders, is leaning on the African Union to hold off on the invasion, which was slated to have occurred last Sunday before Mr. Mbeki intervened, insisting that all diplomatic avenues had not been exhausted.

The Tanzanians yesterday reiterated their intention to proceed, but it is not clear if they are defying Mr. Mbeki, or simply seeking to play hardball with Mr. Bacar.

The Comoros have been plagued by political instability since its independence from France in 1975; there have been more than 19 coups on the tiny archipelago in that time.

The roots of this crisis lie in election held in June last year, when each island had a poll for its resident parliament (the federal presidency rotates among them in a complex power-sharing system). Before the vote, the federal government said Mr. Bacar, who came to power in a 2001 coup, had to step down, having served one term. He refused.

Mr. Mbeki said earlier this week that Mr. Bacar had promised to hold a new election in May, and he accepted that as a basis for a solution. Certainly, Mr. Bacar has shown new willingness to deal, as the troops line up on the nearby island.

But the federal government says the time for talking has passed, and that Mr. Bacar must either flee or face charges of crimes against humanity for his repression of opponents; an interim ruling council will take control after the invasion and a new election will be planned, it says.

But Mr. Ayangafac warned of an Iraq-like situation that could backfire badly for the AU. "We might see a situation where the military battle is won but there is no peace. Does the AU have the political and diplomatic resilience to stay to win peace if this continues for one or two or five years? And where are they going to get the money for post conflict reconstruction and development?"

END TEXT

MARQUARDT